THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) US Ambassador to India, Mr. Richard Celeste on October 6, 1998 was reported to have stated "we believe that the only way in which differences between India and Pakistan can ultimately be resolved is through direct bilateral discussions". In response to a question he was reported as having said that "I don't believe that one can view this solely as an internal matter" and that it had "regional and global ramifications".

(b) This was taken up with the United States Government.

ON October 7, 1998 the US Embassy in New Delhi stated that US Ambassador's remarks were quoted out of context. On Oct. 9, 1998 US State Department clarified that there was no change in the US policy regarding J&K. Further, it was also stated that Ambassador's remarks were a semantic matter that is not significant from US perspective.

Government have noted the above clarifications.

Denouncement of terrorism in J&K by US President

1316. SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that during his address on 21st Sept., 1998 to the General Assembly, the President of United States strognly denounced terrorism in the world in general and in Kashmir in particular and urged the world nations to act together to bring pressure on these States to stop this;

(b) what further steps the US have taken to deal effectively with Pakistan which is encouraging and abetting terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir; and

(c) what steps. Government propose to take in the matter?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) In his address on 21st September, 1998 to the General Assembly, US President said that terrorism is a "global problem" and a "clear and present danger to tolerant and open societies and innocent people every where". In this context, he referred to the presence of terrorist elements in Kashmir.

(b) and (c) Goverment have consistently drawn the attention of international community, through bilateral interactions and in multilateral forums to Pakistan's continuing and unabated sponsorship of terrorism in Jammu & Kashmir and other parts of India. This matter has been taken up on a number of occasions with the US authorities. The US side has conveyed that they understand India's concerns and that the US takes a serious view of such terrorist activities. US has also designated the Pakistan based Har-kar-Ul-Ansar as a terrorist organisation under the US laws.

Cross Border Road Traffic between India and Pakistan

1317. SHRI KHAN GHUFRAN ZAHIDI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Pakistan and India have agreed to open cross-border road traffic; and

(b) if so, the details of border areas selected for this purpose?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) and (b) An agreement and a protocol, providing a framework and operational mechanism for a bus service between Delhi and Lahore through AttariAVagha road border for the nationals of India and Pakistan, were initiated and on 3rd December, 1998 by the leader of the Indian and Pakistani delegations following discussions held between the two countries

in Islamabad from 2 to 3 December, 1998. Follow up action has now to be taken for the signing of the agreement by the two Governments. The bus service is expected to commence by the middle of January, 1999.

Indian/Pakistani Fishermen in Captivity

1318. SHRI BRAHMAKUMAR BHATT: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) details regarding number of Indian fishermen in the captivity of Pakistan and Pakistani fishermen in captivity of India;

(b) whether it has been agreed to free some of the fishermen during the meeting held between the officers of both the countries;

(c) if so, how many have been freed and whether such meetings will normalise the relations; and

(d) if so, when the next such meeting will take place?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) to (d) Following discussions during the meeting between Foreign Secretaries of India and Pakistan held in Islamabad from 15-18 October 1998, as part of the composite dialogue process, India and Pakistan conveyed to each other through diplomatic channels the details of fishermen to be released by either side.

A delegation of Indian fishermen and Boat Owners Association went to Karachi on 8 November, 1998 to facilitate the identification and repatriation of Indian fishermen. 190 Indian fishermen returned home on 23rd November 1998.

We have conveyed to Pakistan our decision to release 149 Pakistani fishermen in our custody and asked them to make necessary arrangements for their repatriation to Pakistan. Pakistan has informed us that a delegation of Pakistan Fishermen Association would be arriving in India on 7th December, 1998 to facilitate the return and .repatriation of Pakistani fishermen.

It is our view that in future when fishermen/fishing vessels of one country inadvertently stray into the territorial waters of the other and are arrested, they should be immediately offered for release and, after completion of due procedures, repatriated.

We will continue to take up with Pakistan the release of the remaining Indian fishermen in their custody.

Bus Service between Delhi and Lahore

1319. SHRI K.M. KHAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have decided to run a bus service between Delhi-Lahore during December, 1998;

(b) if so, categories of buses to be provided, fare and modalities required for passenger to undergo the same at Delhi;

(c) whether to ensure safety of Indian passengers, Government propose to ensure registration of these passengers by officials of Indian High Commission. in Pakistan on arrival at Lahore bus terminal;

(d) if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor;

(e) whether Government propsoe to introduce similar bus service from Hyderabad to some towns of Pakistan in near future; and

(f) if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) to (f) An agreement and a protocol, providing a framework and operational mechanism for a bus service between Delhi and Lahore, were initiated on 3rd December, 1998 by the leaders of the Indian and Pakistani delegations following discussions held between the two countries in Islamabad from 2 to 3 De-